

**March 19, 2017**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

*[28] 1 Exodus 17:3-7 / Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9 / 2 Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 / John 4:5-42*

God's people had been liberated from Egyptian slavery. However, in the face of hardship, instead of gratitude, they complained to Moses. Indeed, it seemed they preferred the false security of bondage over the gift of their miraculous freedom. Nevertheless, God did not turn his back upon them. Even as they attacked God's messenger, Moses was directed to strike with his staff the rock of Horeb, so that "the water [would] flow from it for the people to drink." The responsorial also admonished the people "harden not your hearts" and made reference to a saving rock: "...let us acclaim the Rock of salvation." The problem was never God, but the weak faith and lack of gratitude of God's people. The first reading ended with the question, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?" The real issue was a refusal to discern and to acknowledge the divine presence. The psalm offered a corrective, "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving."

Do we see God's hand in our lives? Do we dispose ourselves to him and to his grace? Have we become complacent or even comfortable in our sins— so much so that we avoid genuine conversion and mercy? Times change but people do not. We have been freed from the greater captivity to sin and death. We were the devil's property. As the reading from Romans emphasized, our Lord made his sacrifice not for the good but for the bad. The Jews who followed Moses did not deserve to be saved. Fallen men and women did not merit the intervention of Jesus. But God took the initiative in saving us.

Again, the point has never been that God saves the deserving but that he saves sinners. This makes Jesus into the foundation stone of our faith. Simon is called ROCK only because Christ extends something of himself to Peter. Jesus is the invisible head of the Church. The Pope is his vicar or visible head of the Church. God uses human instruments like Moses and Peter but it is ultimately God who saves his people.

Water emerges from the rock to give life to God's people. This image is taken to a spiritual level in the New Testament. We are particularly reminded of baptism where we are called to die with Christ so that we might rise and be reborn in him. Baptism becomes a measure of God's goodness to us and it requires our cooperation. We are all called to the well, now refashioned as a font. We are summoned to drink of the graces that Jesus holds out to us.

The Gospel gives us the familiar story of Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman at the well. Her people were breeched from the Jews but still among the first called forth by God. Jesus would heal the fracturing among God's Chosen and call them to unity as a new People. Jesus violates accepted propriety. He speaks to her despite her being a woman of questionable background and a spurned Samaritan. He asks for a drink. She rebukes him. Jesus notes her ignorance about his identity and says had she but make the request, he would give her "living water."

This expression “living water” was often made in reference to “moving water.” At the pool of Bethesda a sick man lamented that he had no one to place him into the water when it was stirred up. Moving or living water was viewed as spirit-filled and capable of healing. They imagined it was moved by God’s hand. Jesus simply told the man, “Rise, take up your mat, and walk.” Jesus was the real living water. This encounter was similar, although the woman was in need of a moral healing and not a physical restoration.

The Samaritan woman is perplexed by Christ, thinking that his words refer to the water in the well. He tells her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Still not understanding him, Jesus tells her to get her husband. The door is opened to the woman’s shame. She has no husband and Jesus enumerates that she has had many men who were not her husband. Immediately, she acknowledges the truth. This is not unlike Confession, when we bring our sins to a priest.

Wounded, she tries to move the discussion to a grievance between Samaritans and Jews about the proper place of worship. Jews offer sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. Samaritans like the ancient Jews thought that sacrifice might be offered anywhere (as on their local mount). But our Lord side-steps any debate. While Jesus says that salvation comes from the Jews, he agrees that a time is coming when true worship will be where ever God’s people “worship the Father in Spirit and truth.” This comes to fruition in the clean oblation of the Mass wherein we offer the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. God comes not just to save the Jewish people but all who would believe in his Son.

This woman was indeed a sinner, and it may have been through dire circumstance and poverty that she became what she was. But she was also a woman of faith who believed in the promise of God. She said: “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Then Jesus told her something that would shake her world. Nothing would ever again be the same. He said, “I am he, the one speaking with you.”

She runs off to her people, leaving her jar. Jesus can get his drink but she has gotten water that was far more important. She takes the posture of a disciple. She proclaims the Good News that Jesus has given her. She becomes a prophetess for her people. In turn, others would also come to Christ, believe and know healing and transformation.

Christ is still the foundation stone of his Church. Peter his ROCK continues to shepherd through a two thousand year line of successors. The Catholic Church is the house that Jesus built. Generation after generation, we are called to encounter Christ and to receive him, the one who is the living water. The water of Jesus washes away the sins of the world. The water of Jesus brings healing and refreshment to the soul. The water of Jesus can make all things brand new. Our Lord is present in the Church as a living spring or oasis. He calls us from our aimless wondering through the desert of the world. He makes himself the drink and food of a new People. God keeps his promises.